

Parallel to 1934 French Case Is Noted

# Scandal Seen in Death of Ben Barka Case Figure

By Waverley Root  
Washington Post Staff Writer

PARIS, Jan. 18 — The death yesterday of Georges Figon, a key figure in the Oct. 29 disappearance of Moroccan opposition leader Mehdi Ben Barka, threatened today to turn the case into the biggest French scandal since the Stavisky affair of 1934.

Serge Stavisky was a colossal French swindler who involved many highly placed persons in his affairs. The authorities were apparently afraid to bring him to trial. He was found dead in a mountain chalet when the police finally got to him, and many people doubted it was suicide. Stavisky's lawyer was quoted today as having said it was "suicide by persuasion," and that he hoped Figon's death was not the same.

The 1934 affair caused the firing of the prefect of police, the storming of the Chamber of Deputies by protesting rightist organizations, and the subsequent overthrow of the government.

Figon, an ex-convict, had told newsmen that he saw Ben Barka slashed to death by Moroccan Interior Minister Mo-

ammed Oufkir shortly after Ben Barka's abduction by two policemen.

## Death Called Suicide

Last night Figon was found dead. Police said they heard a shot as they were about to enter the apartment where he was hiding, and the authorities called it suicide.

The parallel with the Stavisky case is strengthened by Figon's having been in contact with press and friends despite the police's "inability" to find him; by the involvement of high officials; and by the government's stake in the case, which has strained French-Moroccan relations.

Government sources reported today that French counter-intelligence chief Marcel Leroy had been suspended. He admitted Saturday that one of the men charged in connection with the Ben Barka kidnapping had been a French secret agent for eight years.

Louis Souchon, one of the policemen who helped abduct Gen. Barka, testified in court Saturday that the plot to kidnap Ben Barka and hand him over to the Moroccan police had been known in advance



GEORGES FIGON

... death may rock France

by members of the French secret services and police.

## 'Suicide' Is Doubtful

The French press today treats Figon's "suicide" with reservations.

"The news raises many questions," the conservative newspaper Figaro said. "The first question obviously is, did Georges Figon, who was still flooding city rooms with his

reports, 'confessions' and 'relations' only 48 hours ago, really commit suicide?"

Another newspaper, Combat, noted that Figon "had been telling those who met him ... that there had been recent attempts to kill him."

The rightist Aurore headlined the story, "He killed himself, police say," with the last three words in italics.

But prosecutor Georges Chavanon said he is convinced Figon's death was a suicide. If so, it puts the police on the spot.

## Shown in Pictures

A warrant for Figon's arrest had been issued two months ago. While the police seemed unable to find him, journalists interviewed him; acquaintances reported seeing him in his usual haunts, and the weekly magazine Match came out today, after Figon's death, with pictures of his recent "strolls in Paris." One showed him on a street corner, with a uniformed policeman a few feet away. In another, he is walking by judiciary police headquarters, with three policemen visible in the doorway.

The pre-trial investigator in charge of the Ben Barka case, it was learned, will not have a chance to study the documents police are said to have seized in Figon's apartment last night. Instead, the investigation of Figon's death has been assigned to another official—one who had handled the case 10 years ago when Figon was sent to prison for six years for armed robbery.